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Some Websites Judge You by the Kind of Computer You Use

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

Last week, the Wall Street Journal had a [report](#) about the online travel company [Orbitz](#). The newspaper said Orbitz shows Mac users higher-priced travel choices at the top of search results than users of Windows. The company began doing this after research suggested that people who use Mac computers spend up to thirty percent more for hotels than people with PCs.

Cameron Yuill is chief executive of a digital media and technology company called AdGent. He is also a former employee of Orbitz. He says this kind of marketing is just another example of how the Internet is influencing the way companies target consumers.

CAMERON YUILL: "Mac users tend to be more affluent than PC users, so why not target them with the messages that are going to resonate with them?"

This kind of price discrimination is also known as dynamic pricing. Mr. Yuill says it is a very common marketing tool, especially in the travel industry.

CAMERON YUILL: "Next time you're on a flight, ask the person next to you what they paid for their ticket. And I guarantee it is not the same, the same dollars that you paid for yours. If you're traveling at a certain period of time, or you're a business traveler or you bought your ticket last minute, you will always get charged more."

Companies have always gathered information about their customers. But now they have a lot more ways to do it. Eric Martin is a partner at Boost Partners, a management consulting company. He says the Internet has increased the amount of data that companies can collect.

ERIC MARTIN: "Technology is creating an environment where your searches, your online behavior, leads the seller to know much more about you than would, for instance, a retailer when you walked into their store."

A salesperson in a store can only assume certain things about you based on your appearance. Online sellers, however, have far more information to work with.

Eric Martin says this includes information about which website directed you to them.

ERIC MARTIN: "Which has a bearing on how they view you as a customer and what your buying habits might be. The people that you deal with you online can't see you at all physically. But they know that, for instance, when you came to Orbitz you may have been directed there by Kayak, which is itself a comparison site, which then may lead Orbitz to believe that you're searching for deals."

Information about the referring site is only one of the things that a site like Orbitz will consider. Is the person a return visitor? Which hotels has this person viewed in the past? Websites collect this kind of information by placing small files known as cookies on a person's computer.

In the case of Orbitz, Mac and PC users were actually given the same choices. However, they appeared in different orders. For Mac users, the higher-priced hotels showed up higher in the search results. Orbitz says ninety percent of its users book a hotel that appears on the first page, and mostly in the top five listings.

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report, written by June Simms. I'm Steve Ember.